



Historic District Commission
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Guideline #2 - Signage

These Guidelines have been developed by the Historic District Commission to assist applicants. Each request will be reviewed individually by the Commission based on its own merit. Exceptions to these guidelines may be made by the Commission on a case by case basis. The examples used in the guidelines reflect buildings in the district which are Victorian, but alterations to a building should reflect the era in which the building was constructed. Signage within the Historic District can be approved by the Museum Director or Curator, who reserves the right to submit requests to the Commission at their discretion.

The Historic District Commission uses the Secretary of the Interior's [Standards for Rehabilitation](#) as interpreted by the [Preservation Briefs](#). Copies are available at the Manistee County Historical Museum and the Planning & Zoning Department at City Hall.

Signs give a wealth of information about a particular time and place. Because historic signs often lack uniformity, they create a sense of vigor, spirit, and diversity. However, sign regulations are important within historic districts. Sign types need to integrate well with the historic character of the building and district. Here are some questions to ask when thinking about signs:

- If the business is changing hands, how can historic signs be reused or replicated? The scale of the structure will dictate the size of the sign. The placement of the sign should not cover important architectural features or elements.
- How can corporate logos and signs be adapted to blend with the historic character of the structure or neighborhood? In an age of uniform franchise and generic plastic signs, matching or blending them with the historic character of the building is nearly impossible. Modification of color, content, design, and size is needed. An appropriate sign would be made of wood, preferably engraved or embossed, with creative decorative elements (i.e., gold leaf, carvings, etc.). Two choices to secure signs to the wall include mounting the sign perpendicularly with brackets, or mounting it flat to the wall or fascia.
- Signs should be compatible with the design qualities of the building's facade and with the surrounding historic context. They need to be compatible with the scale and design of the building.

SIGNS AND REGULATIONS

Signs are important for every community because they give necessary information to a passerby. They may reflect the identity and character of the area. Over time, signage types will change in accordance with architecture and technology changes. Since they can leave a lasting impression on visitors, the

Historic District Commission can regulate various aspects of the sign (i.e. height, size, color, type, number, location, etc).

Sign Types:

- *Hanging or Suspended Signs.* These are signs that are either hung or suspended from a ceiling or other structure.
- *Wall Signs.* These are signs mounted flush against the building or painted directly on the building.
- *Projecting Signs.* These are signs that protrude from the building's surface. They include perpendicular signs that hang out over the sidewalk, marquee signs, and other variations.
- *Ground Signs.* These are signs that are not attached to a building. Ground signs shall be open base mount (posts). Solid skirt panels are discouraged.
- *Window Signs.* These are signs either painted or hung on windows visible to the public from the exterior. Should be appropriate, visually pleasing and reflect the time period of the building's architecture.
- *Upper Story Window Signs.* These are signs either painted or hung on windows visible to the public from the exterior. No more than twenty percent (20%) of glass maximum. Gilt print is recommended. No internally lit or neon signs are permitted.

The signs listed above are not exclusive. Generally, a sign is considered something that promotes, identifies, informs, or advertises. A variety of signs may include logos and symbols. Variations in signage include posters, print on awnings, art on blank walls, display of flags, and A-frame signs on sidewalks. The sign's form, function, placement, color, material, and lighting method are all important considerations.

While sign regulation and control is to maintain public health and safety, it is also used for aesthetics. Signs in the historic district are reviewed to maintain the area's character. Signs cannot be installed to conceal, destroy, or violate any architectural features of a building.

Signs that are installed on an interim basis, such as realtor and construction signs not exceeding sixteen square feet in sign face, are allowed for the duration of the project. However, these signs should not cause a visual nuisance.

Prohibited signs include, in addition to those identified in the zoning ordinance, anything that obstructs historic or architectural features; misleads, interferes, or confuses the viewers; and destroys or impairs the historic integrity of the resource or district.

General Sign Criteria:

1. Only on-premise business identification signs are permitted in the city.

2. All signs shall comply with the regulations for erection and construction of structures as contained within the City's Building Code.
3. Signs must use appropriate materials and be compatible with the historic character of the building. For example Bright chromium effect, glossy or leatherette finished vinyl is not acceptable on a Victorian era façade. Natural materials such as wood are appropriate on a Victorian Building.
4. Colors shall be appropriate for the era and the building. Fluorescent colors are prohibited.
5. The texture of sign must be compatible with that of the building facade. ***Sand blasted signs are not allowed.***
6. With the exception of "Lighted Open Signs" (see standards below), ***internally illuminated signs are not permitted. Flashing, intermittent, rotating signs or signs that create the illusion of movement are prohibited.***
7. Shape and form of signs shall be proportioned in mass and scale to the building where they are installed.
8. Logos (Corporate Logos) shall be integrated with designs compatible with the Historic District.
9. Plastic appearing materials are not allowed.
10. Halo Lit signs are permitted in the Historic District if they are simply stated (no Bright chromium effect or plastic appearing materials) with minimal illumination. The Commission reserves the right to reduce the illumination in the event that it is over-stated.

The Historic District Commission reserves the right to address businesses that are not in compliance with the guidelines of the district or for failure to apply for a permit.

Existing non-complying signage will be brought into compliance upon receipt of any application to the Historic District Commission.

The following table provides the sign requirements for signage in the Historic District that does not require review from the Commission.

Sign Type	Standards
<i>Portable Signs or A-frame Signs</i>	Eight (8) square feet, per sign face, maximum Professionally fabricated signs are encouraged Not to exceed four and a half (4 ½) feet from ground level Placement on sidewalk where sign does not interfere with the pedestrian path.
<i>Informational Flags</i>	Limited to one (1) flag per storefront Informational flags are allowed Flags must be of a size and shape and mounted in a manner so that they do not interfere with the pedestrian path

Sign Type	Standards
<i>Lighted "Open" Signs</i>	<p>Limited to one (1) sign per storefront</p> <p>Limited to 1.5 square feet.</p> <p>Limited to "Open"</p> <p>Logos and other design elements such as geometric embellishments are not allowed.</p> <p>No more than two (2) colors are permitted.</p> <p>First Floor only</p> <p>Flashing, movements are not permitted.</p>

- Signs exempted from HDC review include commemorative plaques (max. 1 sq. ft.) or signs required by federal, state, or local ordinance for purposes of traffic, public safety, and directional assistance.
- Signs prohibited at all times include signs that create the illusion of movement or make noise, signs attached to any natural growth, and signs that are abandoned and do not relate to existing business.

Historical Background relating to signage

The signs in the downtown should work with the architecture to create a positive image for individual businesses and for the downtown as a whole. Four general concepts should guide the design of all signs.

- Each sign should be carefully planned to fit its facade. It should not be so large that it overwhelms the facade. Instead, it should be designed so that it looks like a part of the total facade rather than tacked on. It should not cover important details, but should complement them.
- Each sign should be coordinated with any other signs on the facade. The signs should look like they belong together. Each facade (storefront) should have no more than two or three signs.
- The signs on neighboring buildings should be coordinated. They do not need to be similar, but they should not clash in color, size or design. There should be a harmony between them.
- Most important, each sign should have a high level of quality of design, materials, and workmanship. A simple well-made sign is far more appropriate than an extravagant sign which is sloppy in appearance. Quality sign makers should be able to do attractive signs using appropriate materials and colors.

This drawing shows a Catalogue of the typical signage types that are appropriate for Historic Facades. Signage proposals should be limited to two, or at most, three signage types.

Painted signs on upper floor windows

Small flat signs hanging perpendicular to the facade wall (Projecting Sign)

Long, horizontal flat signs under the storefront cornice (sign panel)

Small flat hanging signs in the entry recess

Canvas awning with sign on its front flap

Window Display

Painted sign on windows and/or door

Movable signboards or placards for special announcements (portable or A-Frame Signs)



Signage Suggestions



Signs should be planned to fit into the facade rather than be applied to it. They should look like a balanced part of the facade.

If more than one sign is desired, each sign should be relatively small and visually related to the others.

A lowered ceiling inside a store often creates an enlarged transom area which can be used as a sign panel. The sign should be carefully designed to fit the available area without becoming overwhelmingly large. Window display should be used as a typical part of storefront signage.

Signage Problems

Signs which are too large overwhelm a facade. They destroy the balance between the various parts of the traditional facade.

Flashy or electrical signs are not appropriate on the traditional facade and are prohibited in the Historic District.

Signs should not cover up important parts of the facade.

Too many signs on a facade create a cluttered, confusing appearance.

Signs advertising product brands first and the business second should be avoided in favor of signs advertising only the business name and/or the service rendered.

Signs should not reduce the window display area.

Haphazardly-placed signs make the storefront look cluttered and sloppy.

Even temporary signs should be carefully placed.

